

 **Columbia Business School**

The Columbia Institute for Tele-Information

# The UN's Global Digital Compact: Considerations on the Zero Draft

**April 16 2024**

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**Eli Noam:** All right. Okay. So, welcome. Good morning. Good evening, wherever you are. I'm Eli Noam. I'm a professor at Columbia University, director of the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information, a research institute that's been around for almost 40 years. So, 75 books, hundreds of papers, thousands of events on topics of Internet, telecom, media, communications, economics, business, policy, and related topics.

So, today's topic will be the UN's Global Digital Compact, Considerations on the Zero Draft. Now, what is this about? We'll hear about it very soon. Most of us who are maybe knowledgeable about digital technology, but not necessarily about this particular process issue. When they hear digital compact, they think about some kind of old music technology, recording technology, but I'm sure we will be told something better.

The subject, as I understand it, has to do with the United Nations member states negotiating a Compact for the Future that would be passed or discussed in September at the United Nations in New York. There is related, and that's the topic for today, a kind of Annex Zero Draft, drafted by the UN Secretary General's Envoy of Technology, or released by them, which will be part of this more broader, wider Pact for the Future that will be adopted at the Summit of the Future in September. This is a subject of obviously great interest. We had 220 registrations as of yesterday, last night, but, for those of us

who are not directly involved, there are several questions that might we'd like to see some clarification, some enlightenment.

Three. The first is what are the process issues of governance and why do they make any difference to the world? The interplay between intergovernmental, governmental decision making and multistakeholder participation. The role of the secretariat in New York versus the ITU in Geneva, versus the Internet Governance Forum that takes place for a good number of years now, involving many of the NGOs.

Second question, beyond the process questions, what does the Zero Draft say about substantive policies? It talks about artificial intelligence, digital public infrastructure, digital human rights, connectivity, information integrity, cross border data flow. Can you tell us what about it is interesting, important, possibly new? For most people, this is the heart of the matter.

Third, why is a consensus important? Is a consensus achievable? But beyond that, achievability, is it actually desirable? This is a very diverse world. There are many political differences around the world, there are commercial interests that differ around the world. There's innovation that is quite rapid and at different rates and paces around the world.

Why, of all things in the world that is a diverse world, should Internet and those issues related to the Internet, be necessarily harmonized and based on a consensus that might not be stable, a consensus that might be too much for some countries and not enough for others?

And so these are some of the issues that we will hear, plus others.

Before I pass this on to Bill, I'd like to thank Jason Buckweitz, the executive director of the CITI, for the technical management of many aspects that bring us here together. I'd like to thank the speakers for joining us, but in particular, I'd like to thank Bill Drake, who has put this program together. Bill has a doctorate from Columbia, right here, and has returned to Columbia as the Director of International Studies and as an adjunct professor at the Columbia Business School.

Go ahead, Bill.

**William J. Drake:** Thank you, Eli. I'm trying to deal with the fact that Anriette is having problems with her connectivity and seems to have fallen out of the room and doesn't know how to get back in.

So, but we'll get started anyway, and hopefully that will be resolved soon. So, hello, everybody. Thanks for joining us. For this month's installment to the seminar series,

we've covered a wide range of issues on global digital governance since launching this series last year. I should say our next meeting will be in four weeks.

On Tuesday, May 15th on the topic TBD, but probably the governance of disinformation or AI, depending on what the UN does. So let me turn to this week's topic, which is the digital Global Digital Compacts Zero Draft. Just a little background for folks who are not living and breathing this stuff.

So, soon after taking office in 2017, UN Secretary General Guterres moved to make global digital governance and cooperation a central part of his ambitious agenda for reforming and strengthening the multilateral system. In 2018, he launched a trajectory of work involving multiple assessments and consultations on digital policy issues, which inevitably has involved multiple proposals for the establishment of new organizations, instruments, and programs to address these issues.

As always, proposals for new things have both advocates and skeptics, the advocates saying that, there's a range of new issues that don't have a good centralized home in the UN system, so we need to have some kind of new mechanism for them, and that the existing frameworks that exist out there, that may be national or mini lateral type deals leave too many countries out and unable to have a voice, so we need an inclusive multilateral space.

But conversely, skeptics tend to say, that putting all the digital issues into the UN environment provides bad incentives for bureaucracy building and flag planting and geopolitical struggles of the sort that have made most multilateral negotiations over Internet related issues fairly unproductive in a lot of ways.

Plus, there's financial problems, which is, the UN's got issues, parts of the United Nations in Geneva are being shut down as we speak. Because they can't pay the bills. So there's a lot going on with the usual kinds of debates happening. In 2018, the Secretary General did a strategy note on new technologies, proposed that he should have a new Tech Envoy to lead, coordinate the Secretary General's work and the UN system wide activities.

In 2019, they had a High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation that put out a report that proposed a series of different types of options for new institutional architectures, none of which got traction. There've been multiple efforts to try to talk about how to implement that work. Then in 2020, he released a Roadmap for Global Digital Cooperation, which proposed formally to establish this Tech Envoy position and to create new groupings on digital financing and capacity development, and a new advisory body on global artificial intelligence issues, and a leadership group to build support for the Internet Governance Forum. And then, the following year, the Secretary General released the our Common Agenda Report for the UN's 75th anniversary, which formally proposed this Global Digital Compact to be agreed at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, and this would be annexed to the Pact for the Future, and they

began work on a bunch of different issues, released some policy papers, including one that proposed. A variety of new quote, capabilities, including global repositories of experience for digital public infrastructure digital human rights advisory mechanisms, high level body for AI, a follow up process related to a code of conduct for information integrity or disinformation issues.

So, on most controversial in that set of proposals, many of you will remember in May 2023 was the proposal for a new digital cooperation forum, which had a kind of broad, any and all digital issues, kind of mandate, as envisioned, and seemed to basically duplicate the Internet Governance Forum's agenda to a large extent, except that it would be done in a more top down New York intergovernmental kind of way rather than the bottom up community way based in Geneva that we have with the IGF, and that would position this new forum as the sort of hub in a series of hubs and spoke relationships with the other specialized bodies.

There was strong opposition from stakeholders to this proposal. We did a session about it in this seminar series where people debated it. Eventually, that concept was dropped away, but then there began a lot of attention shifted to artificial intelligence with the Tech Envoy moving very quickly. They established a high level advisory body in October 2023, and almost immediately issued an interim report calling for a global AI governance framework anchored in the UN Charter, the sovereign states, et cetera, et cetera. A final report for that is coming soon.

And then consultations were launched, and there were a bunch of consultations from June 2022 to April 2023 with written inputs. And then this Zero Draft was dropped April 1 of this year, just a couple of weeks ago, that proposed a number of things including a new digital human rights advisory service, an artificial intelligence and international scientific panel on AI that produces. Monthly reports, a hundred million dollar global fund for AI with voluntary contributions, a big annual meeting to debate AI a new office in New York for systems wide coordination through the Secretary General of all digital kind of work, and an annual reporting process on Global Digital Compact progress, including every two years, a high level review with participation of stakeholders and so on. So, a lot contained in that Zero Draft document.

An intergovernmental consultation was held April 5. There has not yet been a stakeholder consultation where people from the business community, technical community, and civil society, could weigh in and provide inputs in an organized manner on the Zero Draft. So, that's part of why we're having this meeting here today to try to help fill that gap and provide a place for us to start having a meaningful conversation about what's in the Zero Draft, and how does it affect stakeholder interests and what should be done.

I should point out also that there's some other things going on soon. There's tomorrow will be another meeting held through the WSIS+20 multistakeholder grouping that ICANN staff are supporting.

That will be talking about these issues and hopefully people will begin to focus on how we can get stakeholder inputs provided into this process. So, anyway, that's the background. So, to start the conversation, we have an excellent panel of experts who have been prominently involved in the Global Digital Compact discussions, as well as Internet governance more generally for a long time.

In both civil society private sector and Internet technical community, stakeholder communities. Chris Buckridge is an independent consultant to Internet technical community representative on the Internet Governance Forum Multistakeholder Advisory Group. He's the co chair of the advisory group's working group on strategy, and he's a member of the board of directors of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, ICANN.

Previously, he worked for more than two decades with the Regional Internet Registries, including APNIC and RIPE NCC. Anriette Esterhuyzen and she's joining from the Netherlands. Anriette Esterhuyzen is Senior Advisor for Internet Governance at the Association for Progressive Communications.

Previously, Anriette was APC's Executive Director from 2000 to 2017, and she has served as Chair of the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group, and she's joining us from Geneva, where there's a UN meeting going on right now. And finally, Timea Suto is Global Digital Policy Lead at the International Chamber of Commerce.

She leads the ICC's policy development and advocacy work on digital policy, the Internet governance issues, And she has worked in the past in research and teaching roles in Budapest and Paris. She's also at the UN in Geneva right now. So we have two people joining us from the UN, where, as I say, some of the lights are being turned off, elevators are not working, and so on due to budget crisis.

So, interesting times.

So, the mechanics of this meeting, as always, we'll have four rounds of questions to the panel, to the top, and then as always at the top of the hour, we'll have open discussion. We have a lot of participants in the room who have experience in this area, so I'm hoping we can have a good, robust, and interactive dialogue involving everybody.

So that's the game plan for today. Let's begin then with the panel. Why don't we start with what's in the Zero Draft? What's been proposed? What's in? What's out? What does it mean? Proposals that panelists think are worthy and doable. Could be stronger, could be problematic, et cetera. I suppose probably particular attention might be devoted to some of the new organizational structures, instruments, and programs that have been proposed that I mentioned previously, but there are many other issues in the Zero Draft as well that get flagged.

So, Chris, why don't we start with you?

**Chris Buckridge:** Thanks, Bill. And, yeah, thank you for the sort of well, quite detailed, I was going to say potted history, but really quite detailed history leading up to this point.

I think it does feel like good to actually have a draft now to be working with. This has been, well, 18 months or so now that this process has been working its way to this point. There have been a number of consultations during that time.

**Chris Buckridge:** A little. I think for some of us, there's been concern about the modality of those consultations. There hasn't been strong records of what input there was or how that was going to affect each other. But, I think looking at the draft that we have now, it's clear that the co-facilitators have been listening, and have taken note of some of the input that's come to them via those consultations.

In reading tea leaves before this came out, there was a feeling, certainly from some people, I think, that it was going to be a pretty bare bones document, that in its sort of now understood role as an annex to the Pact for the Future, it would be relatively slim, a quite focused document.

I think what we see here in the Zero Draft is not that, it's more expansive than perhaps some expected. And that's perhaps positive. To me, I think probably it feels like a lot has been put in here as a sort of preliminary step, as a sort of response to all of the feedback and input that they've received as co-facilitators, with the understanding, or the implicit understanding, that it will be whittled back as we go into negotiations, which the member states will lead and will take part in, and that's to be understood, and I think that's part of the context that you mentioned, the UN's liquidity crisis, which is now very explicitly being discussed and is having impact on UN operations.

So, I think there's going to be that sense of pragmatic realism, not necessarily something you're going to see reflected in the text of the Global Digital Compact, but it's absolutely going to inform the negotiations that take place as people consider what might be included and what realistically the UN can afford to be doing in terms of new activities and new structures.

I posted a link in the chat, just because I had included a table in that blog post, which gives you a sense of the structure of the Compact. It's pretty logical in terms of setting out some principles for how it will work and then structuring it around five objectives. I don't think there's anything too new there.

I think the focus is obviously on what UN and its member states can do in terms of coordinating, and I think that need for coordination across digital cooperation, digital governance, Internet governance discussions, is an underlying driver for this whole project, this idea that things are spinning out of control.

There are a lot of different digital governance, digital policy discussions going on, and the connecting tissue between them is perhaps failing, or perhaps not even being put there in the first place as these new structures and discussions spin up. So, in that sense, the real focus that I've been looking at, from a governance perspective, is a lot of the follow up and review processes there, and particularly how this fits into a lot of those existing structures that are already there.

WSIS is coming up to 20 years, with its review next year, and the sort of sense of how this all fits into that and into the other UN processes that are going on, because you now have this Summit of the Future Global Digital Compact work stream that's really somewhat adjacent to WSIS, which is a very deep sort of stream of activity involving a number of different UN agencies.

You do also have, for instance, the AI panel that the Secretary General spun up, which is separate to all of these things. You have the work in the OEWG on Cybersecurity. You have the work to develop a cybercrime treaty, which is yet another stream. So I think what you're seeing is really a growing complexity, and perhaps, in some, in a lot of cases, disconnectedness of these streams.

The GDC is perhaps an opportunity to bring some of that back together and to try and reclaim the coordination that's going to be necessary in terms of global digital governance, digital cooperation. But I think what we see in the Zero Draft is a bit of equivocation there, both recognizing that WSIS is important, it's there, and the IGF as that sort of multistakeholder flagship for that is there and can be playing an important role.

Then, on the other side, saying we're going to need a new office in the Secretary General's, or the, sorry, the General Assembly Secretariat. We're going to need a new high level every two years meeting to assess what's going on here? We're going to need these other structures.

So, how that resolves itself, I think, is going to be really one of the more interesting discussions that we see as we come into negotiations in the coming months. I'll stop there. I'm not, don't want to over talk here.

**William J. Drake:** There's no such thing, but okay, great. Thank you for that, for getting us started.

Anriette, your thoughts? And I hope your connectivity is working.

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** I hope so, too. .

Thanks, Bill. I don't have that much to add to what Chris has been saying. So, I think it's actually a strong document. In many respects, I think that they did a fairly decent job of

incorporating input because there are quite substantial differences between this and some of the previous policy briefs that we have seen.

I think that the challenge really, I want to pick up really from... maybe let me emphasize some of the really positive things.

I think that it does a better job at harmonizing some of the SDG approaches and goals, and some of the WSIS approaches and goals, and I think there is a need for that. I think there has been a gap that's been left by both these big processes when it comes to digital and the Internet specifically. So, I think the principles capture and brings together... what we have is the WSIS principles and some of the SDG principles.

I think it's really good that there's a focus on digital public infrastructure, because I think that is not just an important area, it's also an area that where it's easier to come up with clarity on what the role of the state is, what the role of private actors are, what the role of civil society is. I think some of the stakeholder roles and responsibilities have become quite unhelpfully muddled in the WSIS process, and I think this new document potentially gives us the opportunity to look at multistakeholder processes and investment and cooperation in a more nuanced, but also in a more precise way.

One area where we feel there's not enough, when I say we here, I'm talking on behalf of APC and my network, we feel that there's not enough recognition of the failure of redressing digital divide issues and establishing connectivity. It's good that it focuses on it. It might be good to have a little bit more acknowledgement that there's been failure at market level, so there's market failure and there's also failure at the level of what the public sector has done.

Oh yes, and digital public goods, I think it's good that there's a focus on that as well, except we have to unpack what it really means.

As Chris says, the weakness of the document is that it's still not really telling us how we are going to collaborate, and who's going to ensure that there's effective collaboration across the board going forward. And, if you look at the section of the document, yes there is mention of the IGF, there's mention of the WSIS implementation agencies, but then at the same time, there's this emphasis on creating a new coordination function within the SGS office.

Now, I think we have to acknowledge that there is insufficient coordination within the UN system. There's definitely need for something better than what we have at the moment, but I think the document at this point in time doesn't really give us answers that, to me, sounded awkward and convincing that it's going to be any better going forward, and I'd like to see here more emphasis on, using existing WSIS mechanisms using the IGF as a participation platform, although there's good text on that, using CSTD, and we have reference to that, but I'd like to see something more concrete, and



perhaps that role that is identified in, I think, paragraph 56 or for the liaison, the Geneva liaison.

I think it would make more sense to have GDC follow up, harmonized and connected to WSIS follow up, located in Geneva with a New York liaison rather than a Geneva liaison, and I'm saying that very much from the perspective of somebody working in the Global South. I think member states do not need another digital track. They are already working within the WSIS framework with lesser and greater success. We see this from the G77. As well, their reaction to the Global Digital Compact, also emphasizes the need to look at WSIS because this is work, this is time for developing country delegations, and if they have to divide up their digital development participation and implementation processes between a New York process and a Geneva process, it could just fragment their efforts.

So I'll leave it at that for the moment, Bill.

**William J. Drake:** Well, you started out by saying you don't have that much to add, and then you added quite a lot, so thank you, Anriette. Okay, Timea, your thoughts?

**Timea Suto:** Thanks, Bill. Thanks, first of all, for having me here. I've been listening to these webinars for quite some time now. It's quite a sensation to be on the other side of the virtual table here, so thanks for having me. And thanks also for asking me the question last, cause it's really easy to come in after Chris and Anriette, they've said most of it. So all I can say is yes and I maybe just add two little bits.

So, completely what Chris and Anriette have identified, and all the input that you've had in the intro, it's spot on. There's quite a lot in this draft to discuss. When I was preparing for this conversation, you asked us in preparation to think about what's in there, what's not in there that should be, and then what does this all mean, and where do we go?

As I was preparing, the one thing that started percolating in my mind, what's in here is a lot of new language. If you read this document, in comparison to other digital documents that the UN has put out, there is a change in tone here. If you look at it, there's a change in editorial style, there's a change in ambition. I think both Chris and Anriette alluded to the fact that this is really a meaty document that really tries to go into some of the nitty gritty that we have to deal with here, and it goes into quite some ambitious targets and commitments not only for member states, but also for other stakeholders, and, in particular, there's quite a few call outs there for the private sector.

What is a bit difficult for me, when we look at all this new language, to comprehend is there are some concepts in this new language that is being introduced that are a bit hard to interpret that, we don't know what it means, right? There's a lot of use of "we" in this draft, but we don't quite know what they refer to when we say we. in usual UN documents, this we means the member states, but here, the we, who does this include? Because a lot of the times, the responsibilities that they refer to in this draft, when they

say we, it seems to mash together both public and private sector responsibilities and stuff that stakeholders and member states do, but doesn't quite differentiate on who is supposed to take responsibility, or for what part of the issue different stakeholders are to take responsibility for, so I think there is one thing there in the language that, that we would need probably a bit more unpacking.

The other thing, and this Anriette alluded to, is this idea of digital public goods which is being tossed around quite a bit in this process. This is not something that this draft introduced. We've been having conversations on the digital public goods idea without anybody really defining what that means. We are aware of what digital public infrastructure is, but digital public goods and being used in the same way and the same sentences sometimes, or sometimes even interchangeably, could be a bit problematic, and we would probably need a bit more definitions there.

Now what's missing in some of these drafts? The colleagues here have noted that the draft goes into quite a bit of policy issues. I think there is a lot of good policy recommendations there, a lot of good issues that are being brought in, including elements on connectivity, elements on global data flows, that I think I see them in the first time in a UN resolution or document in this way, and I think that's a step forward, but what's missing is context, quite a bit of context, for some of these recommendations that the draft goes into.

Also, on the elements where they have really good language. For example, with connectivity, it talks a lot about the need to invest in connectivity or to scale up, the idea of bridging the digital divide, but it doesn't really go in to the context of how does the private sector take decisions to make investments in connectivity. It doesn't talk about the general ecosystem around making sure that you connect the unconnected. And that's not only about rolling out infrastructure, but it's about incentivizing the drivers of connectivity. How do we do that? How do we create those policy environments? How do we make sure that the context in which the private sector makes investments is enabling, it's stable, it's predictable. That is what the private sector really hoped for the GDC to do, to recognize what needs to happen, and the policy context for these investment decisions to be able to take place. I lack that context from this document.

Equally, I lack the context for some of the issues that are identified in the data chapter, for example, or the AI chapter, that we already have information on, and right principles, or good base, either in UN documents. Or in documents outside of the UN, that the GDC Zero Draft could have built on, but doesn't. For example, when I talk about data issues and privacy principles, you have the APEC CBPRs you have the -- sorry, for those of you who don't follow this -- the privacy guidelines from the Asia Pacific Economic Community, the OECD's privacy guidelines as well, then when you look into the AI conversations there's little mentioning of actual principles that are already there in the UN's latest adopted AI resolution, or even in UNESCO's AI Ethic Principles. The draft laments the lack of human rights protections, but doesn't really talk about transparency.

So, there's quite a lot of half unpacked topics here that I think need a bit more context if we want to make this a seminal document. So, that is just first impressions from my side. I think what we need to be careful of is new language, new way of talking about the same issues, and being perhaps a little bit remiss of some of the good context that is already out there in substantive issues, and I think if we marry those two, it's a bit worrisome because then we try to fix things with new processes that all of you have mentioned, that perhaps then it's not necessary if you're a bit more mindful of the context that we already have there. So that's just two cents for me to start.

**William J. Drake:** Great. Thanks, Timea. Well, let me try and press you guys a little bit more on some of this. Several of you made reference to the question of coordination and whether there was sufficient coordination in the UN system. Of course, we all know the old expression that everybody likes the idea of coordination and nobody wants to be coordinated.

You have all these different things going on in the UN system already in the specialized agencies and so on. A lot of the play, as far as I can tell here, and just going back to the beginning of this GDC process and a lot of the meetings we had with the Tech Envoy and so on, seems to be to build stuff in New York that would be system wide control and dialogue spaces.

And the question that always comes up in that context, then, is New York is a much more political kind of environment. With the General Assembly being there, discussions of Internet issues in New York, one tends to think, could very well bring out the usual geopolitical kind of stuff, which tends to sort of mar cooperation and progress, and that's been a concern, right? And so, here you have a proposal that there'd be an annual meeting on artificial intelligence, and, every two years, a high level review of the Global Digital Compact's progress, which sounds a bit like the Digital Cooperation Forum kind of proposal. It's like a broad based, everything digital, UN thing. It's hard to see how those things wouldn't become politicized and difficult.

So, I'm just wondering, I understand the arguments for coordination, after WSIS, there was, of course, mechanisms put in place for some of the lead agencies to talk to each other, but as a general matter, there is probably inadequate coordination, but do we have any concerns about building up this kind of, like, mechanism in New York, close to the General Assembly, as the lead way to do all this stuff? That's what I'm curious about.

Chris, thoughts?

**Chris Buckridge:** Yes, building a bit on what Timea was saying there, I found it very interesting, it struck me, it wasn't something I'd quite thought of myself, in terms of the new tone, the new sort of language, it does feel very different to a lot of those previous documents. And part of that, and Anriette mentioned this, is that linkage to the SDGs, as a framework. I think that, if you're in New York, that's very much an area that you're focused on.

And, it is true that there's been some attempts to make that connection between SDGs and what goes on in WSIS, what goes on in the IGF, but that's probably an area where there hasn't been perfect coordination, and I don't believe there is perfect coordination. It's an aspiration rather than something we're likely to actually achieve.

So, if we look positively, that's a very good thing, and the co facilitators have been really very diligent in trying to make the links throughout the Zero Draft document to specific SDGs, and I think that's a really important form of coordination here in saying, okay, we're talking about this, but it also links to this specific SDG, and that's really useful, and will be really useful going forward, because we have the Summit of the Future and the GDC this year, we have the WSIS+20 next year, which everyone is also looking to, but once we get beyond that, we're going to be into a discussion about what does life after the SDGs look like? Or, what are the SDGs? How are they going to evolve? What is going to be the framework for UN development at the very highest overarching level, and I think digital is going to play into that.

And so, this is probably a really useful step to start making those connections and understanding how they intersect and how they affect each other.

Yeah I absolutely agree, if the result of a New York sort of approach, making those connections, is to shift a lot of these discussions to New York, yes, you will politicize it, because is much more drawn into the General Assembly and its machinations.

Yes, as Anriette said, you will make it much more difficult for certainly global South countries, but also other stakeholders, to actually be involved in these discussions. It will become about the state delegations that are in New York City and the perhaps large professional... other stakeholders that have a presence there as well.

But that will certainly reduce the sort of multistakeholder element of what's happening there, and it would duplicate what is going on elsewhere, and I think one of the really important elements of WSIS and of the creation of WSIS was the recognition that it needed to be deep in the UN system, it couldn't just be about one sort of approach based in one sort of UN agency, it needed to incorporate lots of different elements in the UN ecosystem, and that makes coordination difficult. Certainly that coordination has been imperfect, but you're not going to solve that by abandoning that approach and saying, okay, well, let's manage it all through New York.

What you're going to do then is simply, yeah, lose that recognition of true multistakeholder involvement that WSIS set as a principle and which we haven't always lived up to, but which is an important aspiration to have in this process.

**William J. Drake:** Anriette, what do you think? You're in Geneva. How does it look from the Geneva side?

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** Just repeat your question. If I remember correctly, what you were asking is that, is this realistic?

**William J. Drake:** I'm asking, do we have concerns about establishing in New York, next to the General Assembly, a coordination function for the UN system and several annual or biannual high level meetings that will bring together all governments to talk about the full range of digital issues, as well as AI and the other track.

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** Well, it's a really challenging question, actually, because I think there is insufficient cooperation. But I think, for me, the question is, do you address distributed governance and making it more collaborative and cooperative through centralized coordination or through distributed coordination.

I actually think the answer is distributed coordination. So, I think the idea that with the way in which Internet, never mind digital governance, has proliferated and touches on every single sphere from food security to cyber security, there is a need for coordination and collaboration. I think to imagine that you can achieve that through a single centralized mechanism is naive. It won't work, or it'll cost so much money. You'd need to have, like a kind of a completely new division within the UN and it won't work. So I think having a mechanism in New York for liaison with the General Assembly, we know already that WSIS and the SDG process did not cooperate sufficiently, and I think the fault lies with the SDG process. It doesn't lie with the WSIS process. If you look at the WSIS documents, they fully integrated the Millennium Development Goals, which at that time were the UN New York based goals. I think the SDG process failed to sufficiently integrate WSIS, and I fear that the Summit of the Future might also fail to sufficiently integrate WSIS.

And just to jump from that, Bill, if you don't mind me saying, we're talking about the GDC, but we shouldn't forget that the GDC is part of the Pact for the Future. It's an annex and the Zero Draft of the main document, the document which everyone will look at, doesn't mention WSIS, not even once. So, I think coordination, yes, but I think we already have the UN group on the information society. We have UNDP working with digital public infrastructure. You have the ITU working with connectivity. So, I would much rather see a collaborative and networked approach within the UN rather than to think you can centralize it in New York.

So, just a little final reflection. Timea correctly said, who's we? And there is that joke about the Lone Ranger and... but I won't tell it.

But I think, if you look at the document, when it gets to calling on actors, it calls only on the private sector and on governments, unless I misread it or I overlooked, and I find that highly problematic, speaking from a civil society perspective, and also considering the critical role of the technical community in digital governance.

**William J. Drake:** Thanks. Yeah, no, I think that is a concern. It should be noted that the distributed approach was one of the ideas that was put forward in the High Level Panel paper in 2019, and it's just drifted away. So instead we're focusing on building new organizational structures with, lots of, full time slots and so on in a centralized kind of capacity place, which is a different kind of configuration, which is.

Not surprising. Timea, did you have a thought on this point?

**Timea Suto:** Yes, and probably not very much original thoughts. I think Anriette and Chris said well, what they said in terms of what are the pitfalls of centralizing coordination, and I completely agree with that.

It seems to me, coming from the private sector, it's like an organizational management issue. Here you are, your organization is growing, you have more staff. So, how do you make sure that all your staff is working in the right direction? And, a beginner manager, we're going to start and insert themselves into each process and try and micromanage what everything is doing just to make sure that centrally all the information is there, and I think we're making everybody report to the CEO, so the CEO is aware of what's going on. Possibly that's not the way to go. Nobody has that kind of time and you lose a lot of creativity and collaboration opportunity if you try and centralize everything. I think what is necessary in this case is that you really articulate the mission and make sure that everybody is pushing the cart in the same direction.

And that doesn't have to be a centralized agency, or it doesn't even have to be a new function that collects all the member states into one meeting. The SDGs don't have one SDG opportunity or one SDG agency in the UN. What they do is they actually try to get the SDG philosophy into everything else. If you don't have forums to talk about it, then you can come together and report.

But, in the digital sphere, actually, we do have forums to come together and talk about it. And we have mentioned the UN Group on Information Society. You have all the UN agencies coming together under that. They have their forum every year at the WSIS Forum. They have those conversations. Then we have the multistakeholder Internet Governance Forum, another opportunity to talk about.

So, it's not about not having opportunities to share and coordinate. It's about that was not functioning the way that we would want them to, and that doesn't mean that you have to throw out all these babies with the bathwater. It just probably need to make them play nicer together. So, perhaps we should focus on that.

**William J. Drake:** Yeah, no, there is already this coordination mechanism outside through the WSIS. So, the notion that you have to have bureaucratic staff to do it is an interesting one.

All right, just the last point on this, just real quickly, on the AI panel, do people think that's a good possible solution to the AI issues, to have an expert type panel that's conducting studies and reporting in a way comparable to the climate change kind of work?

Is that the right approach, do you think, for AI issues? Chris?

**Chris Buckridge:** Me? Sure. I don't necessarily have a strong view. I think it's probably useful to have a venue for those discussions, and to have the input of experts there. I think that there is no escaping the fact that there is a felt need to have discussions of regulation and in relation to AI. Whether this is the right venue for that, for putting that kind of a mechanism, or whether it fits more easily into something that's already existing in WSIS, is a bit of an open question.

This is not to shut out New York and New York agencies and institutions, and there may be important work that can be done there, but there is the question of how well it integrates back into what's going on, and I think we had a bit of a demonstration of the fragmentation of the AI discussion just in the last 12 months where we had the Secretary General's High Level Advisory Board, which became just an advisory board at a certain point, producing its report in the same year that the IGF Policy Network on AI produced an initial report, which actually addressed quite specifically some of the gaps that the advisory board was talking about, so, for instance, the regulatory alignment gap, and had some suggestions on ways to mitigate that. So, you could see these two processes that really should have been coming together and consolidating what they were doing, but not.

That's the kind of situation we need to try and avoid, and that's where something like leaning on WSIS, in trying to achieve the goals that the GDC has, would be useful.

**William J. Drake:** Okay. Just any other thoughts from you two, and then maybe do one more round and pretty soon I want to open it up to everybody to get some of the other people in the room engaged.

Anriette, any thoughts on the AI body? Does that seem like we're moving towards a good solution on that point?

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** No, I don't like it. I don't mind decisions to delegate discussion about how to address AI in the UN system. I don't like that the Global Digital Compact, which is linked to the Summit of the Future, so which should be really future oriented, is so preoccupied with AI, which is one, not new, and secondly, not the only cutting edge or emerging technology related challenge that we have to deal with. So, I'd like the document to bundle together AI with other emerging issues and challenges rather than focus on it in a way that I think could actually detract from the long term value of the document.

At the same time, I think it is a good idea for the UN system to be able to delegate to working groups or panels, or to an IGF policy network like the AI one that Chris mentioned, or to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, which does excellent in depth reports on digital related challenges.

So, I like the idea of taking an issue that is challenging and having a separate delegator to process, as long as they kept low cost, open and inclusive, and as long as there's clarity about who they report back to, because I think that is often not clear.

**Timea Suto:** Same. I would add one more process to what Chris mentioned. Yes, the IGF was working on an AI report. The High level Advisory Body was commissioned while the UN General Assembly was passing a resolution on AI, and that's there, and the text is out there.

And then, when you look into the GDC Zero Draft, I don't see much language being lifted in there from an existing resolution that is already a UN document that a lot of work has been done around. So, again, we're calling for more coordination, but then we're not really looking at stuff that is already out there and it's working.

And my other question was so what is the need, what, again, the context that is missing from the draft, what is the need for such a scientific body on AI? If it's about monitoring policies and research that's being done, look at the OECD AI Observatory. It's an amazing resource tool that is beyond just OECD countries. It monitors everything from news articles, to new research, to new policies coming out in AI, almost in a real time basis. It's out there. It can be built on top of. If we need research, the research is being done. It's being done at universities, it's being done at think tanks, it's being done in the private sector. Do we need a new UN body to commission research that is already being done elsewhere?

Again, we're shutting down elevators, so how are we using the resources that we have in a manner that is actually moving the debate forward, and is the best use of the resources that we have?

And I am not sure that we are at the point where this conversation has been really thought through about the need of the AI. I think we need some of those functions that Anriette mentioned. We need research. We need conversations. We need to share the information that is out there, but I don't, I'm not sure that tasking a new body with this and spending a lot of money on that, it's going to come up with the solution. I don't think that the functions that we need to do correspond to some of the solutions that are being proposed in the draft. So, not very convenient.

**William J. Drake:** This is the first time I've ever heard shouting down elevators. I've always shouted into the ocean when I didn't want to be heard, so I've learned something today.



All right, just a last quick spin around the table, then. Imagine, then, that something like this Zero Draft survives more or less intact in terms of the main kind of proposals for new activities as an annex to the Pact for the Future in September, and that is implemented, where do you guys think we would be a year or two from now in terms of the impact on the IGF, and the impact on the larger global digital cooperation?

Do you think these mechanisms will put us in a better place? Would this raise challenges for the IGF as the kind of more bottom up, multistakeholder, and inclusive kind of process that many of us have been devoted to building?

Just quick thoughts on that, and then we'll go to the whole group.

Chris?

**Chris Buckridge:** I think the text that we have here feels like it touches on the issues that are perennial to the IGF, to WSIS, which is, where does the money come from? And I'm setting aside the liquidity crisis, which may or may not get resolved.

For 20 years, the IGF has been scrounging money, trying to build a, sustainable, consistent funding base. This is going to have the same challenge, and there is some passing reference to that in the text about setting up new funds, but saying we're going to set up a new fund and the private sector is going to contribute is easy. I can talk about setting up my own 10 billion dollar fund. I don't think I have much chance of doing it. So, this is going to have that same struggle.

Now, if they're holding meetings in the UN premises in New York, that will probably happen, but I do think there is, and it's been discussed by many people, that there is limited resources, both in terms of money, in terms of time, in terms of attention, and this is going to, if you proceed with this kind of new structures alongside the existing structures, you're going to simply diminish all of them, and the IGF will be among those diminished. I think the WSIS Forum will probably be among those diminished as well.

What I would hope might be a positive outcome from all of this would be to see some of those WSIS structures and institutions working a little better and with more complementarity with each other, so, for instance, the IGF and the WSIS forum, which happened at opposite ends of the year, probably haven't been as complementary to each other as they might have been.

But, if this is a sort of spark to say, okay, we need to step up the coordination within that WSIS structure, if only so that this discussion happening in New York can be fed back into a more logical, cohesive structure, then that would be a positive outcome here.

**William J. Drake:** Okay, thanks, Chris.

Anriette, any thoughts on the impact of IGF for the larger environment of cooperation?

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** Look, I think that the best case scenario here is that that this document reinforces the important work that has taken place through the Human Rights Council, and the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights, in ensuring that... and the guiding principles, the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, hopefully, it can reinforce that.

Hopefully, as Chris says, it gives us stronger WSIS mechanisms, that it's the opportunity for the IGF to strengthen its internal operations and its documentation and communication of IGF processes, and, hopefully, it will also fill some of the gaps that's currently left by the WSIS process.

Will it make a huge difference? I'm not convinced it will, because, firstly, financing. I think the text at the moment on financing in the document is very unimaginative. It's very business as usual, international financial mechanisms, private sector, public sector, doesn't really look at how do we diversify markets, how do we have blended financing, how do we finance community based connectivity initiatives, for example. All the stuff that we know market failure has resulted in, it doesn't address that.

Similarly, it doesn't address the very big picture issue of how do you regulate mega multinational Internet platforms that are violating human rights, left, right, and center, and that are in fact, in many cases, just increasing concentration of ownership and control, and in some ways, they might be stimulating innovation at a local level in developing countries, but in other ways, they're stifling innovation.

So, I'm not convinced. I don't think it's a bad thing. I think the compact has good text, I think it's a good initiative. I'm not convinced that it's going to bring about the actual changes on the ground.

I think the other real gap at the moment and is how do you link the global to the regional to the national? It says virtually nothing about that, and that's where the under emphasis on the role of the IGF, and the achievement of the IGF in establishing an ecosystem, that does actually connect global to regional to local, is completely overlooked. That is really where we should be investing so much more, because otherwise nothing will actually change.

**William J. Drake:** Thanks. Timea?

**Timea Suto:** Thanks. Well, on its own, this GDC, it's going to be a document that is there, as many other UN documents, and it's going to have some ambitious targets. I think we see that, in all the member states and all the stakeholders, that we want this to be an ambitious document.

In its own, I'm not sure it's going to do much, but this document doesn't exist on its own, it exists as part of the UN processes, and I want to highlight two that we need to be confronted with in the next five years. One is the World Summit on Information Society 20 year review next year, and then the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda ends in 2030, which is five and a half years away. And if you if those of you who have been around this process and live and breathe these things, you remember in 2015, when we had the 10 year review of the WSIS Summit, and the conversations on what's going to happen after the MDGs, we've had the development conversation here, and we've had the digital conversation here, and there was very little overlap.

In past years, and in this document in particularly, I see the two processes really getting married together, and then we have the whole conversations in UNFCCC and other places around the digital and the green transitions, and I see all that conversation being married together as well.

So, what the GDC can do, and I think is really well set up for that, is to bring the conversation on how digital and development will move together or has to move together, and if you do it well, and if the GDC does it well, it can remind us, as Anriette said, and as Chris has said as well, that we have processes set up through the WSIS system that can help bring this conversation into the UN, and then perhaps after 2030, we can have the development, digital, green, conversations in one go.

So, I see the GDC as the first moment for that. It has potential to to drive this process both in substance matter, and also in the process context, in the way that, if this is a proper multistakeholder process, that can lead us into multistakeholder ideas, or the idea of multistakeholder approach also being brought into the UN's larger agenda after 2030 a bit more clearly.

So, there's a lot of potential here, but I think what it depends on is for all of us who are aware of these processes, and both me and Anriette are here in Geneva, being able to remind folks in New York that there are processes afoot in Geneva that are here to be used in these broader goals.

So, I think that's where things will fall or move forward with.

**William J. Drake:** Okay, great. So let's open it up then to the room and hopefully we have seen a lot of lively conversation going on in the chat. Hopefully some of the folks that have been talking there will want to put their hand up and have a say here.

Okay, so we got one here. Jeff, go ahead. Good to see you.

**Jeffrey Hart:** Hi, Bill. Well, I'm diving into a discussion that I left maybe a decade ago, and so it's a great refresher course for me, and I'm glad to hear you guys are thinking

about these things. I just retired from Indiana University and I'm now living in Berkeley, California in the heart of the beast, so to speak.

A lot of the issues here... people are very confused about AI here, so it doesn't surprise me that they would be confused in the UN system, and there's a lot of hype and ridiculousness over the AI issue, which is a very multifaceted issue. We have on one extreme, the Elon Musks of the world who think that we're close to, what is it they call when the machines take over our...

**William J. Drake:** Singularity.

**Jeffrey Hart:** Singularity, right? But really, a lot of the big issues have to do with private companies with huge databases that use the huge databases to train the AI to do stuff, mainly to target advertising. But, in the process, they have basically appropriated lots of information that people have volunteered, and so, the huge privacy concerns there and the question of who owns or who has the right to access that information.

Also I'm very interested to see what is included and what isn't included. Right now we have basically an oligopoly emerging in the cloud with companies using the cloud as the place to provide services on the Internet including AI services, and the question of that concentration of power via the cloud and the sort of creation of private walled gardens is a topic of discussion here in the Bay Area.

**William J. Drake:** Great, Jeff. Thanks for that. I don't know if anybody wants to respond to any of those points in particular, or should I are there other people who'd like to?

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** Just a quick one from me, Bill, I'm all for multistakeholder collaboration, but I also think we do need to keep corporations accountable. I think the compact glosses over that. It calls on companies to behave appropriately. Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't call on companies to behave appropriately, but we know, as Jeff has just outlined, that they don't, and somehow the compact for me glosses over these really big challenges that we want to work collaboratively with the private sector. Absolutely. Digital development is all about that. But we also need accountability and checks and balances. And I think it's a little bit weak on that.

**William J. Drake:** Okay, great.

All right. So Paul then Nigel. Paul, go ahead.

**Paul Hjul:** Hi, thanks.

I think the compact is inevitably going to suffer from having to make a decision as to who to placate and who to give a big stick to. I think the propensity in these sorts of documents is to try and get as many people to sign on to it, so accountability is going to

be lost as much as possible. As much as I agree with Anriette 's critique that the document just fundamentally does not actually provide for any room for a basis for accountability for the private sector, I think a technical decision as to who is best placed to ensure accountability does come into the framing.

**Paul Hjul:** So, in my mind, the sort of prudent course here is to get as much buy in to some principles, and to make sure that the WSIS process doesn't collapse completely. I think it's like a three step exercise.

I admit I've only read over the document twice, currently avoiding studying for exams, so I've taken only a cursory read, but in my mind, there's enough good in the way the document is set up that you can almost submarine in a couple of minor tweaks that give you the foundation for what you need.

I was particularly concerned with the way the wording on, bringing in the private sector, increasing diversity. It's very clear to me that the logic there is to say, well, civil societies already, in fact, I think it's implied that civil societies over represent, but I think we should ignore that implication, and rather read in the implication that civil society's got its act together, and it's governments and the private sector who need to actually come to the party, but more importantly need to show, adequate deference, for that matter, to the WSIS, and to IGF.

So, I'm inclined to say we shouldn't look at throwing the baby out here. What we just need to do is add, like, little weasel words in and be a little bit sneaky about it. Yeah, I hope I have cynically covered the ground there.

**William J. Drake:** I've not heard an endorsement of weasel words in a while, so sure, why not?

Chris, thoughts?

**Chris Buckridge:** I was, I think, smiling a little when Paul was saying it makes sense to stick to, or focus on, principles in this document. I'm smiling just because it reminded me, and I'm sure some of us on the call have been going back to the NetMundial 2014 document, principles documents, which was a very effective multistakeholder process that came up with some very well considered principles, which, as I say, now many of us are thinking a bit, again, about a bit in the context of the NetMundial Plus 10, which is going to happen at the end of this month.

That's a separate discussion, but I think it's worth, taking the lesson that, when in that sort of first NetMundial process, in thinking about what can we do here to improve the digital governance situation, what they came up with was, basically, we can come up with principles, and if we can all agree on these principles, that's going to be an important step forward.

Now, yeah, that leads to endless discussions about an IGF that's non-decisional, and we need bodies that can actually set the rules here. But again, you end up with a Zero Draft here which doesn't really do that. So, I think we find ourselves hitting the same wall again and again, and we need to take the lessons of history, and we need to think about what's the best way to actually approach this.

**William J. Drake:** All right.

Let me go to Timea. Timea, do you have any responses?

**Timea Suto:** Thanks, Bill. Just really quickly, I think there are... what is it that we can do as the UN, right? That is the question that we need to solve. I don't think that the UN has ever really been effective in regulating private actors. I don't think that we want to imply that it should. What the UN can do effectively is to set norms and principles that we can all collectively buy in, and a prerequisite for the buy in is a seat at the table, and developing those norms together and in a multistakeholder fashion, and that is actually what we've been calling for.

Yes, there have been a lot of multistakeholder consultations in the run up to this draft, but if you want the private sector to buy into those calls that are being set out, then you need to have the private sector at the table, writing those calls and actually being part of what is feasible and what can be done, and what is the policy context that needs to be in place for the private sector to be able to live up to those costs, because it's not always just depending on the private sector.

**William J. Drake:** Getting sustained and diverse participation on the private sector is always a big challenge in these processes with people, it's hard for them to stay focused. I see Nigel Hickson from the UK government. He must be at the UN because I see a ceiling above him that looks like that. Hi, Nigel. Your thoughts?

**Nigel Hickson:** Yes, and good afternoon, and thank you, Bill, for organizing this and hosting this. And it's good to be with colleagues. Yes, no, this is my front room. It's just rather large.

**William J. Drake:** You live in the UN, huh?

**Nigel Hickson:** Yes, it's a very nice room, actually. But no doubt we'll get thrown out in a minute.

But Yeah. I'm at the UN CSTD discussions where no doubt we will be reflecting on the Global Digital Compact in a special session tomorrow morning, so that will be instructive as well.

Just a couple of words, and I want to be optimistic, I suppose, and I go back a few years to when many of us said the UN never talks digital, the UN never mentions the Internet. The Sustainable Development Goals were a wasted opportunity, which some of us thought they should have talked about technology more. So, to have this focus on digital issues on technology issues, on Internet issues, I think is a step forward.

The Zero Draft, I think, took some of us by surprise, not others that perhaps had anticipated it. I lost the bet, but it was only on a pint of beer, because I thought it would only be about six pages, and it turned out to be double that, or more.

But, I think there is quite a lot there, and, just to cut to the chase, I think the issue is that we have to get it right. As Anriette said, this is going to be a lasting compact, whatever mechanism will be used to review it, and we all have views on that, and certainly we believe it should be an existing mechanism, that's one in Geneva, or whatever is agreed is going to be there for a time, and is going to influence further developments, and that's where it can be very positive, because it can influence the WSIS+20 negotiations in a way which I think we're already seeing, and being optimistic again, that no one, to my knowledge, either here or elsewhere in the world, In UNCSTD or in various other discussions, is calling to sunset the WSIS+20 process.

Yes, there'll be discussions on how it should move forward, how it should evolve, but no one is saying sunset it. No one is saying that the IGF is past it. Yes, people have views on how effective it is and how it should evolve in the future. So, I think we can grasp these opportunities to embed, if you like, digital and Internet and technology into the framework of our future discussions.

So I'll leave it there.

**William J. Drake:** Just to clarify, Nigel, the existing processes that you think would be then sufficient? So, the CSTD and the WSIS follow up process, you think? Based in Geneva, or what are you suggesting as a alternative to what's being proposed?

**Nigel Hickson:** As a government, we haven't, specified what specific bodies.

Personally speaking, I think if you just say the WSIS process, then that's a bit vague. People think, well, the WSIS process is a process, it's not a mechanism which can monitor developments and that. Okay. But yeah, whether it's the UNCSTD or whether it's a number of bodies working together, a coalition of... you have a secretariat made up of a few bodies, I don't know.

But certainly what we don't want is a multistakeholder process based in New York, a new body. And not as anything against New York, but, having a new mechanism, I think, would be wrong.

**William J. Drake:** Okay, great. Anybody want to respond to Nigel's points?

Chris, nothing?

**Chris Buckridge:** No, I don't have anything particular to add, I think.

**William J. Drake:** I think Nigel, you captivated everybody so fully that they're just speechless. Anriette or Timea? Or should I move on?

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** I'd like to hear more voices. I think Nigel always captures things in such a clear way, so I agree with what he said, but I'd like more comments and questions from others if possible.

**William J. Drake:** Okay, I see a couple more hands and I also see some comments in the chat that I'd like to read out. Judith and then Mike. Go ahead, Judith.

**Judith Hellerstein:** Yeah, thanks so much. So, I would love to have seen a lot more issues or like what K was saying. We're not using the phrase global interoperable Internet, which is one in standard... which would be interoperable with different devices, standard base, and also we're looking at, as especially a lot of these come out, there's a lot less focus to ensure that the Internet remains open for persons with disability because a lot of these things are more picture based, image based, which are excluding a lot of persons with disability.

At the IGF, I co-lead a Dynamic Coalition, with Dr. Shabbir, on persons with disabilities, and there's a lot of talk in there about that there isn't any space for them, that they are being excluded, and we can't have a government only process, which doesn't have a large voice from civil society of... that we want to make sure that it doesn't exclude persons with disabilities because it seems to have that.

I will post a link in the chat for Dr. Shabbir's comment on that.

**William J. Drake:** Okay, great. Thanks, Judith. You know what, let me take two questions because we're starting to move towards the end of our time. We take Mike's question also, then people can respond to both in an integrated way. Mike, go ahead.

**Mike Nelson:** Thanks for a very great discussion, as always. I wanted to pick up on something Anriette had said, and also pick up on something she just put on the chat.

She mentioned the need for integrating the local and the regional and then global. That's the strength of the IGF. It's also been the strength of the ITU's Global Symposium for Regulators, which I think is probably the best thing the ITU does. It brings together the ministers or the vice ministers of telecom and they share with each other, and they take home lessons that they then can implement in national policy.



I think there's actually an unfortunate disconnect between all the people who go to the UN thinking we're going to create global treaties and global standards, and we're going to somehow get everybody to do this thing, and 15 years later, they don't have anything to show for that effort, but, under the covers, and in the meetings, and in the bars after the meetings, they've actually taught each other a lot about what's going on and how to do best practices and worst practices. So, my question for Anriette is how do you think we could make the IGF more effective, and help the people who are right there implementing tools and policy at the local level and the national level? Because I don't think the UN embraces that as a task. It can be a very important one.

**William J. Drake:** Great, thanks Mike. There's a little bit of connectivity problem in DC. Maybe they need a little help with the local infrastructure.

Okay, so Judith's question about interoperability, language and so on, and disabilities, and then Mike's point. I want to read one question from the chat as well. So, go ahead. Chris?

**Chris Buckridge:** I can jump in. Actually, I think Judith's point and Mike's point fit together really nicely from my perspective, I think partly because what they're both talking about is the sort of the depth of this issue, and it's not something that can be easily captured in a single document. There are layers that have been left out of the GDC here, and they're important layers, discussions of accessibility, of access, looking to, stakeholder groups with disabilities, looking to Global South, and that's what is able to be done in some of the WSIS structures.

Mike mentioned the the IGF, and I think one of the things that the IGF, it's really clear now, has fostered this extensive network of national and regional initiatives, not in a sort of top down way, not in a sort of establishing the way, it's happened in an organic way, but in a sense, trying to provide that sort of coordinating mechanism, and that's something that, I think Mike is correct, has not been really embraced at the highest levels of New York UN bureaucracy, but is really important, and is something that we can advocate for as we're going into these discussions leading into the GDC, and leading then into the WSIS+20 next year.

**William J. Drake:** Great. Anriette?

**Anriette Esterhuysen:** Thanks, Bill. And just quickly to Judith, I think that is really an important point. You also touch on a challenge. I think we need to also think critically whether all the language and concepts and approaches that have evolved out of Internet governance apply to all digital governance, and I'm not sure that's an assumption that we can make, but I think it's something that we should think about.

So, inclusion, yes. Interoperability, yes. Probably, yes. Open source and so on. I think what we should do is interrogate that assumption and apply it in a more specific way,

rather than just automatically assume that everything Internet governance, multistakeholder Internet governance, applies to all other digital governance.

And then, in response to Mike, I think the first step would be, and I agree with you completely, it would be if this document, if the Global Digital Compact delegates in a much more assertive way, this role of linking the global to the regional, to the national, to the IGF process, it needs to recognize that the IGF has played that role, and it needs to delegate to the IGF that it continues to play that role with regard to GDC follow up and implementation, and then, I think there are other actions that need to be taken at the IGF end and at the WSIS end.

But, for the GDC, I think that has to be there, and it has to be unequivocal, and I think what the IGF then needs is more capacity to liaise with governmental processes, to be able to politically and astutely play that role of implementing what the GDC, what the General Assembly, has delegated it to play, and it lacks that capacity at the moment.

**William J. Drake:** Great. Thank you, Anriette. Timea, closing thought?

**Timea Suto:** Again, I think Anriette is right. The GDC needs to make clear references to existing processes. We don't have to shy away from the fact that these processes need to be improved or coordinated better. But, I think that The GDC would miss a great opportunity in not designating these processes for its follow up, and thereby lifting them up and giving them the task to really take the opportunity to improve and step up to the game.

So, that's on processes, on the Interoperability question, I like to always say, yes, but it's not only the technologies that need to be interoperable here that we have to talk about, or the talk about the interoperability of the Internet and technical sense, but here we are trying to deal with policy issues for an interoperable Internet, where the policies themselves or the approaches are not interoperable themselves.

When we are breaking off policy approaches into silos that cannot be navigated, especially by businesses that use cross border transactions operating across these jurisdictions, and of the Internet, is being stopped or broken up by policies that themselves don't allow it to function in this pan national or cross border level, so, when we talk about interoperability, let's elevate that concept from the way that the Internet works into how we want to make policies.

And I think the GDC could be a good example for that as well, try and get some of that harmonization or coordination into the policy world that at this point is quite similar.

**William J. Drake:** Thanks. Actually some of the early stuff from the GDC, when the issues are being framed they had a lot of language about Internet fragmentation issues, which we've talked about in this series before. That's all kind of dropped out, which is an

interesting development. There have been some other interesting questions in the chat, too, including Matthew Nagoyan asking whether multistakeholder cooperation entrenches corporate capture, and what are the viable alternatives, and so on.

But alas, we have reached the half hour, we're out of time, so we won't be able to get into those now, but I encourage anybody to continue to engage on these issues with each other.

I note again, that Timea pointed out to me, that buried in the letter from the co facilitators, as I mentioned, that there will be a stakeholder consultation on the 24th. It's not listed prominently on the website of the UN, but people should try to prepare to come in there with something more than just three minute statements that don't connect to each other and try and engage really in terms of what's being proposed, and that there will also be a discussion tomorrow in the WSIS+20 grouping for those who are engaged there, around preparation on these issues.

So, okay, listen, I want to thank everybody for a good discussion. Thank the panelists for their contributions. As always, thank Jason Buckweitz, my colleague, who's the executive director of CITI, for managing all the technical stuff behind the scenes here for the meeting. It was great talking to you all.

And, again, we will have another meeting in a month's time, and I look forward to, we'll probably talk about something related to disinformation or AI, we'll see. So. I look forward to seeing people again.

Until then, thanks everybody, and good day.